

Careers events.

What works?



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About this paper

Since its inception, The Careers & Enterprise Company has sought to understand where the evidence exists supporting various careers activities. This review assesses the evidence base on careers events, and sets out where this can be expanded to provide reliable insights for practitioners.

The report presents the evidence on the operation and impact of careers events held in UK schools and colleges. Literature and new data were gathered and analysed to understand the potential impacts and optimal delivery of three related types of careers events aimed at supporting the career decision-making of young people: careers talks, careers carousels and careers fairs.

The paper draws on a mixture of academic literature and new survey data collected by the Education and Employers research team at careers events. The paper uses data collected from a student feedback survey, testimonies from teachers and employee volunteers as well as a follow up survey of experienced practitioners which tested the insights for best practice gathered from the other sources.

In brief



There are a number of high quality studies that provide evidence of improved employment outcomes for young people taking part in careers events, both in terms of wage premiums and reduced incidence of NEET (Not in Education Employment or Training). These studies suggest that careers talks are 'consistently effective' (level 4) according to the Early Intervention Foundation evidence scale).

The wider literature, evidence from a survey of 256 students (12–18 year old) as well as the informed opinions of a further 38 experienced practitioners carried out for this review, suggests that participation in careers events with employers can also have positive impacts on the decision making, employability skills and educational engagement for the young people taking part.

Young people can be expected to respond to different types of careers events in different ways. Of the three most common forms of careers event (careers talk, careers fair, careers carousel), it is the careers carousel which appears to be most often effective in supporting students.

Executive summary

As modern school-to-work transitions have become increasingly complex, the need for adequate careers provision has become more vital. Technological and workplace organisational change have meant that investment choices (what and where to study and the value of qualifications and experience) have become more difficult. In response, wider research and governmental guidelines have advocated involving employers in careers provision to provide students with a greater opportunity to understand the current labour market and the world of work.

Existing UK literature suggests that careers events are 'consistently effective' equivalent to level 4 impact, according to the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) evidence scale. Several high-quality studies exist demonstrating positive outcomes experienced by career event participants. However, it must be noted that the literature remains very limited on the comparative value of each type of these events. More comprehensive research is needed on the value of different types of career events to students of different age, attainment level and socio-economic background.



The evidence included in this review helps provide a range of helpful insights for practice. For example:

1. Event selection

Young people can be expected to respond to the different formats of careers events in different ways and practitioners are advised to reflect on pupil characteristics and objectives prior to determining event design.

2. Authenticity

It is important that the people providing information to pupils about jobs and careers can draw on personal, first-hand experience of the professions they are speaking about.

3. Volume

The more interactions a young person has with people from the world of work through careers events, the better.

4. Relevance

Pupil perceptions of the helpfulness of careers events are related to better outcomes in later life.

5. Preparation and follow up

Positive impacts can be expected to be optimised when young people are well prepared for careers events and undertake follow up activities after the activity.

1. Introduction

The world of work is becoming increasingly complex and the current generation of young people face significantly greater challenges than preceding generations in making informed decisions about the training and education routes to follow in pursuit of emerging career ambitions.

Technological, workplace change and the marketisation of higher education and training has meant that the investment choices that students make (of what and where to study and the value of qualifications and experience) have become more difficult.¹ As the OECD's Andreas Schleicher has noted:

We do need to accept that labour market transitions will henceforth be more complicated and protracted. Complexity and opacity are key problems for young people as there are a multitude of occupational profiles and it is difficult to see beyond a five to ten year horizon (p 27).²

In response to this growing complexity, international and domestic studies have highlighted not only that careers provision has become more important but that it should be enriched by real-world experiences. With the publication of *Learning for Jobs* in 2010, the OECD emphasised the benefits of fully integrating employers into careers advice programmes.³ For example:

Individual career guidance should be a part of a comprehensive career guidance framework, including a systematic career education programme to inform students about the world

of work and career opportunities. This means that schools should encourage an understanding of the world of work from the earliest years, backed by visits to workplaces and workplace experience. Partnerships between schools and local firms allow both teachers and students to spend time in workplaces. Research studies suggest that young people particularly value information on jobs and careers if obtained in a real workplace and through contacts with working people (p 85).³

Similarly, researchers from Harvard University's Graduate School for Education have called on schools to involve local workplaces and employee volunteers in careers provision from the age of 10 upwards.⁴

This review focuses specifically on the operation and impact of careers events held in schools and colleges. Specifically, evidence was analysed to understand the potential impacts of three related types of employer-led careers events aimed at supporting the career decision-making of young people: *careers talks, careers fairs and careers carousels.*

1. Mann, A. and Huddleston, P. (2017). Schools and the twenty-first century labour market: perspectives on structural change. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 45(2), 208-217.

2. Mann, A., and Huddleston, P. (2015). *What do Recruiters Think About Today's Young People? Insights From Four Focus Groups*. London: Education and Employers.

3. OECD (2010). *Learning for Jobs*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

4. Symonds, W.C., Schwartz, R.B. and Ferguson, R. (2011). *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Americans for the 21st Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Outside of work experience, studies have found that careers events represent the employer-led career activity most participated in by young people in the UK.

2011: 773 young British adults aged between 19 and 24 were invited to look back on their experiences of employer engagement during school. Half of those surveyed recalled receiving careers advice directly from employers.⁵

2017: 1,744 young British adults aged between 19 and 24 again recalled the actions schools and colleges did to prepare them for the working world. Despite careers provision changing significantly over intervening years, 39% of respondents recalled receiving careers advice directly from employers.⁶

Current policy and practice

Careers talks, fairs and carousels have been part of school life for many young people for many years. Over recent years, there have been a number of different government initiatives and guidelines related to the way careers provision is delivered in England. Designed to strengthen the links between young people, education, employers and the world of work, the *Inspiration Agenda* is a government initiative delivered by the National Careers Service aimed at giving young people more contact with the world of work.⁷ In 2015, the Department for Education released its statutory guidance document *Careers Guidance and Inspiration in Schools*.⁸ As part of a wider careers

guidance programme, the Department advised schools and colleges to:

Provide access to a range of activities that inspire young people, including employer talks, careers fairs, motivational speakers, colleges and university visits, coaches and mentors.

Department for Education 2015

Similarly, a recent 2016 House of Commons Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy reinforced the idea that employer-led careers guidance was needed to support young people and their parents to make informed decisions on education, training and employment.⁹

5. Mann, A. and Kashefpakdel, E.T. (2014). The views of young Britons (aged 19–24) on their teenage experiences of school-mediated employer engagement. In Mann, A., Stanley, J. and Archer, L. (Eds.) *Understanding Employer Engagement in Education: Theories and Evidence*. London: Routledge, pp. 143–162.

6. Mann, A., Kashefpakdel, E.T., Rehill, J. and Huddleston, P. (2017). *Contemporary Transitions Young Britons Reflect on Life After Secondary School and College*. London: Education and Employers.

7. Department for Business, Innovation & Skills. (2013). *Careers: Inspiration Vision Statement*. London: HM Government.

8. NatCen Social Research and SQW. (2017). *Work Experience and Related Activities in Schools and Colleges: Research Support*. London: Department for Education.

9. House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills and Education Committees. (2016). *Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance: Government Response to the First Joint Report of the Business, Innovation and Skills and Education Committees of Session 2016–17*. London: House of Commons.

The Careers & Enterprise Company has recently taken a key role in developing guidance for schools when creating stable careers programmes. The Company has worked with Gatsby to apply a set of benchmarks against which to assess provision. These benchmarks advocate increased encounters with employers and employees, learning from career and labour market information to inform their labour market decisions, as well as addressing the needs of each pupil and tailoring careers programmes to reflect these needs.¹⁰

The Careers & Enterprise Company has recently taken a key role in developing guidance for schools when creating stable careers programmes.

Methodology

This review sets out evidence from five sources:

- Academic literature relevant to the delivery and impact of careers events (that is careers talks, careers fairs, careers carousels) was reviewed focusing on research from the UK published in the English language since 2000. The review considered research directly linked to school and college provision (that is all types of schools and colleges ranging from primary education to upper secondary education or equivalent), focusing on young people of all types and ages— in England Key Stage (KS) 2 (7–11-year-olds), KS3 (11–14), KS4 (14–16), and KS5 (16–19). Studies were

excluded if they focused on training or post-18 education (including higher education).

- New statistical analysis of relationships, using 2011 YouGov data, between teenage participation in school-mediated careers events and adult economic outcomes (wages and NEET status).
- Results from a survey of 256 students (12–18 year old) from six English schools investigating the experiences of young people who had attended careers events. The survey asked specific questions around the design of the event, and how the young person's skills and attitudes may have been changed as a result of participating.
- Testimonies from teachers and employee volunteers who took part in the six events. Teachers and employees were interviewed to provide experienced insights into the effectiveness, design or outcomes of careers events.
- Results from a survey of a further 38 school-based practitioners. This survey took the insights for best practice found in the literature, student surveys and teacher and employer testimonies and presented these to practitioners for validation.

The full findings referenced throughout this review can be found in a separate report *How to Make the Most of Careers Events with Employers: Evidence Review for The Careers and Enterprise Company Report. How to make the most of careers events with employers: Evidence review for the Careers and Enterprise Company report Careers events. What works? Technical report.*¹¹

10. Careers & Enterprise Company. (2016). *What Works in Careers and Enterprise?*. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

11. Rehill, J., Kashefpakdel, E.T. and Mann, A. (2017). *How to Make the Most of Careers Events with Employers: Evidence Review for the Careers and Enterprise Company report 'Careers Events. What works?'*. London: Education and Employers.

2. What are careers events?



Different types of careers events

Careers talks

Career talks give students insights into a career by having an employee volunteer talk them through their own career and education pathway, as well as the job they do. They could be in an assembly, in a careers class, or to a small group of students interested in particular careers.

Careers carousels/Speed networking events

These events involve a range of volunteers coming together to speak with groups of young people about their jobs. In a career carousel, a young person will speak individually or in small groups to employee volunteers for a short period of time (commonly 5–15 minutes) about their job/career. At the end of the period, they will move on to a further employee volunteer, circulating around number of different volunteers over the duration of the event.

Careers or job fairs

This usually takes the form of a careers marketplace where 10 or more employers, training providers or universities are located around a large space often at tables (with names and job titles and perhaps other materials related to their work displayed) and students walk round to talk to them about the job they do, the education and training routes they took and ask for advice on working in that sector or job. Some schools will manage events to guide the interaction of young people with adult participants, others will leave it for the young people to decide for themselves which volunteers to engage with.

3. What impacts do careers events have?



Existing UK literature provides helpful, but limited, insights into the impact of careers events on young people. Several studies demonstrate that careers events have successfully supported young people's educational or employment outcomes. The evidence suggests that careers events are 'consistently effective' or their impact equivalent to level 4 according to the Early Intervention Foundation evidence scale. A number of high quality studies exist demonstrating positive outcomes experienced by career event participants.¹² However, it must be noted that the literature is particularly weak on the comparative value of each of the different types of careers events.

By way of context, several good quality surveys illustrate considerable demand from young people and schools' practitioners for careers events. Ipsos MORI's 2009 *Young People Omnibus* found that 72% of year 11 pupils surveyed would find 'listening to or speaking with a visitor from business' to be helpful in what they wanted to in the future.¹³ A 2010 YouGov report completed on behalf of the Edge Foundation similarly highlights that children and young people would generally like more opportunities to engage in such activities. The study surveyed 1,710 Key Stage 4 students and found that 55% would like more visits to or by local businesses with a further 50% stating they would like more visits by training providers.¹⁴

Employment outcomes (wages and NEET)

Kashefpakdel and Percy offer the most robust methodology considered within this review. Their study analysed data from the British Cohort Study, a dataset containing extensive details of thousands of individuals born in 1970 who were studied from birth through to adulthood over a series of surveys completed by themselves and their parents. The analysis found that for each 'career talk with someone outside of school' a young person experienced at age 14–15 young people could expect to benefit, on average, from a 0.8% wage premium when they were 26. Where teenagers found careers talks to have been 'very helpful' at the time, impacts on earnings were still greater.¹⁵

As set out in a subsequent report by researchers from Education and Employers, there is also significant evidence that young adults who recalled taking part in careers talks are less likely to be Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) in adulthood than peers. The 2017 report by Mann and colleagues set out findings from a survey of 1,744 young British adults aged 19–24. The survey investigated the experiences of these young people as they engaged in transitions which took them from education towards the working world. Statistical analysis of the survey data found that respondents who recalled experiencing a career talk with employee volunteers at

12. Early Intervention Foundation. (2017). EIF evidence standards. Available from <http://guidebook.eif.org.uk/eif-evidence-standards> [Accessed 13h April 2017].

13. Ipsos MORI. (2009). *Young People's Omnibus 2009 – Wave 15. A Research Study on Work-Related Learning Among 11–16 Year Olds on Behalf of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority*. January - April 2009. Coventry: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

14. YouGov. (2010). *Edge Annual Programme of Stakeholder Surveys*. London: Edge Foundation.

15. Kashefpakdel, E. T. and Percy, C. (2016). Career education that works: An economic analysis using the British Cohort Study. *Journal of Education and Work* 30 (3), 217–234.

age 14–16 were 81% less likely to be NEET than their peers who did not take part in the activity. Equally, the analysis (which controlled for social background and academic attainment) showed that young adults who recalled taking part in school or college-mediated careers events at ages 16–19 could also anticipate similar much lower levels of being NEET on the day of the survey.¹²

In a further study, Percy and Mann drew on the results of a survey of 985 adults aged 19–24 to analyse the effectiveness of employer-led careers activities in improving school to work transitions. Their study considered employer led careers advice as one of four primary co-curricular activities that also included work experience, business mentoring and enterprise education. While their final analysis does not distinguish between these activities, the findings are still significant for this review. After applying controls for background characteristics such as age, school type, geographical location the authors found that those who have greater levels of contact with employers through school or college have significantly better odds of being in Education Employment or Training and, if in full time employment, can expect to be earning up to 18% more on average.¹⁶ It is also relevant, given the character of careers events, to flag a series of longitudinal studies which have explored the long term economic value of young people possessing realistic insights into the qualifications and education required to achieve career ambitions. Such studies have

discovered evidence of improved outcomes in terms of both earnings and NEET status.^{17 18}

Finally, in new analysis undertaken specifically for this report, statistical analysis was used to test for further evidence of economic outcomes. Using a 2011 YouGov dataset, previously analysed by Mann and Kashefpakdel in 2014 (see below) and with controls in place for social background and academic attainment, it was found that young adults who recalled school-mediated careers support from employers benefitted from 10.6% wage premium, on average, compared to those who received none. Finally, young people who received careers support from employers were 47% less likely to declare themselves NEET on the day of the survey compared to peers who had none.¹²

Career readiness

Careers events are consistently noted as being helpful and useful for young people thinking about their future, especially at key decision making points in their school career. Survey and research material suggest that school staff believe these employer-led events expand young people's knowledge of professions, using the advice given from employer visits to develop their career ambitions and begin practical measures to achieving them. Bennett and colleagues found that there was an overwhelming perception among school staff that employer visits to schools resulted in increased take-up of STEM subjects at Key Stages 4 and 5.¹⁹

16. Percy, C. and Mann, A. (2014). School-mediated employer engagement and labour market outcomes for young adults: Wage premia, NEET outcomes and career confidence. In Mann, A., Stanley, J. and Archer, L. (Eds.) *Understanding Employer Engagement in Education: Theories and Evidence*. London: Routledge, pp. 205-220.

17. Sabates, R., Harris, A.L. and Staff, J. (2011). Ambition gone awry: the long term socioeconomic consequences of misaligned and uncertain ambitions in adolescence. *Social Science Quarterly*, 92(4), 1-19.

18. Yates, S., Harris, A., Sabates, R. and Staff, J. (2011). Early occupational aspirations and fractured transitions: a study of entry into 'NEET' status in the UK. *Journal of Social Policy*, 40(3), 513-534.

19. Bennett, J., Lubben, F. and Hampden-Thompson, G. (2013). Schools that make a difference to post-compulsory uptake of physical science subjects: Some comparative case studies in England. *International Journal of Science Education*, 35(4), 663-689.

Similarly, Mann and colleagues explored the perceptions of 390 UK secondary school staff in relation to 16 different work-related and employer engagement activities which are commonly undertaken by pupils between the ages 12 to 16. They explicitly investigated what school staff think about the impact of those activities (of which they had experience) in terms of pupil employability skills, attainment and progression. 77% of respondents with experience of careers talks and 74% with experience of careers fairs believed them to be 'effective in giving young people

Teachers from a number of the events observed for this report noted the importance of these events in expanding the career aspirations of young people...

a realistic sense of career choices and what they needed to do to secure their job.²⁰ Percy and Mann also highlighted that respondents who had attended a greater volume of employer engagement (including careers events) as teenagers were significantly more confident that they were progressing well towards careers of choice as young adults.¹⁶ Teachers from a number of the events observed for this report noted the importance of these events in expanding the career aspirations of young people, broadening their horizons through encounters with real-life volunteers from across the labour market.

I think for different ages or year groups it can have different impacts. For year 11s it can really widen their career choices and

– especially for the boys – make realise that they don't have to work locally for their dad or uncle. Most of these students have such a tiny social network, seeing someone from outside can really give them a boost before their exams.

Deputy Principal – London¹²

In their 2014 study, Mann and Kashefpakdel present the findings from a survey of young adults who were invited to look back on the experiences of employer engagement they received during their schooling. They investigated whether those young people who experienced these interactions with employers believed, in later life, as young adults, that these interactions had enhanced their school to work transitions. When thinking about their progression into higher education, more than half of young adults who recalled at least three careers talks between the ages of 14 and 19 agreed that employee volunteer careers advice had helped them get into university. A similar proportion agreed that, on reflection, the talks had been useful to them in getting a job and 84% agreed that they had been helpful in deciding on a career.⁵

A 2016 study by Mann and colleagues also found that experienced teachers believed careers talks were effective 'in helping pupils broaden and raise their aspirations'.²¹ Survey data collected from young people attending these events for this review also echoes these findings. The majority of young people who had attended either a careers talk, fair or carousel agreed that the event had helped them think of the possible routes to employment (apprenticeships, university, and training).¹²

20. Mann, A. Dawkins, J. and McKeown, R. (2017). *Towards an Employer Engagement Toolkit: British Teachers' Perspectives on the Comparative Efficacy of Work-Related Learning Activities*. London: Education and Employers.

21. Mann, A. Dawkins, J. and McKeown, R. (2017). *Towards An Employer Engagement Toolkit: British Teachers' Perspectives on the Comparative Efficacy of Work-Related Learning Activities*. London: Education and Employers.

Employability skills

With the number of young people undertaking paid part-time work declining in recent years careers events present young people with an opportunity to speak with adults who are not their parents or teachers.²² Teachers across our sample noted that many younger students rarely have the chance to communicate with adults from the world of work, which can become an issue when it comes to school to work transitions in later life. For example:

I think what young people really need, especially at our colleges, is the chance to improve their soft skills. You know having the confidence to speak about themselves. Which may not be the direct reason for these events but a lot of our students rarely get the chance to speak to adults outside of their teachers and parents. So having someone in asking them questions about their ambitions really encourages that.

Careers advisor – Further Education College, Oxfordshire¹²

A common refrain from teachers and other practitioners interviewed at events observed for this report was how important they were to improving the confidence of young people. There is evidence that these events, especially careers carousels, are very effective in forcing young people out of their comfort zones and improving their basic communication skills. For example:

Having to interact and converse is really good, especially as some of the girls are really quite shy. Some of them are lacking confidence and forcing them into situations where they have to speak and talk to people more is

really beneficial. Getting them out of their comfort zones when they're working with kids from other schools is really great for building their social skills and team working skills. Also having the chance to see where some of these women have gone really helps widen the aspirations, seeing that banking isn't just a men's role is today's example but it helps break down those barriers.

Year 9 teacher – London¹²

Educational outcomes

There is evidence which suggests that participation in careers events can positively impact on young people's attitude toward schooling (see textbox). Survey data collected from young people attending the events observed within this study indicate that engagement in careers events can be associated with more positive attitudes.¹² When asked, the majority of young people agreed that they were motivated to study harder as a result of attending careers events. This is particularly pronounced for students who attended speed networking events.¹² For example:

I think for lots of the young people the academic path to take really isn't clear for them, so they lose motivation because they can't directly apply what they're doing in school to an aspiration of theirs. Hearing people's journeys on how they came to be in these quite impressive jobs really speaks to the young people. We (teachers) speak to them, but the difficulty is lots of teacher's journeys are very similar, and lots of the young people don't really have dreams of becoming teachers so it loses something.

Year 9 teacher – London¹²

22. Conlon, G., Patrignani, P. and Mantovani, I. (2015). The Death of the Saturday job: The Decline in Earning and Learning Amongst Young People in the UK. London: UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

I think it's also massively helpful if they speak to an employer, and employer directly says, this is what we're looking for in terms of grades or qualifications it really encourages them to knuckle down and I've seen this from experience.

**Careers advisor, Further Education College
– Oxfordshire¹²**

International context – Educational engagement

In the international context, there is evidence that bringing young people into contact with employers whilst they are still in education enables them to gain insights into a complex labour market, whilst also changing their perceptions towards employment and schooling. Kashefpakdel and colleagues draw on data from the OECD's 2012 study in which some countries opted to ask 15-year old participants whether they had taken part in a series of career development activities. They find that when young people had taken part in Internships, Job shadowing, Job fairs and spoken with a careers advisor in school, they reported more positive attitudes towards schooling.²³

23. Kashefpakdel, E. T., Mann, A. and Schleicher, M. (2016). *The Impact of Career Development Activities on Student Attitudes Towards School Utility: An Analysis of Data From the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*. London: Education and Employers.

4. What are the lessons for practice?



When designing careers events there are a number of lessons for practice that can be inferred from the evidence. Based on these evidence sources, it is possible to offer advice to practitioners planning events. It should be noted that guidance offered here is based on the insights gathered from both a limited literature and a limited sample of students and practitioners.

Event selection

Young people can be expected to respond to the different formats of careers events in different ways and practitioners are advised to reflect on pupil characteristics and objectives prior to determining event design.

Socio-economic background

Where a pupil is from (socially, economically, geographically) influences their access to, and interaction with, employers and the wider business community. Schools should do more to facilitate these meetings and help disadvantaged young people expand their social networks and increase their social capital. Studies concur that careers events commonly give young people a 'realistic' sense of what their career options are, how such ambitions can be realistically achieved and that this form of advice is of particular value to disadvantaged backgrounds. Studies by Sabates and colleagues and Yates and colleagues have highlighted long-term implications of uncertain or 'misaligned' teenage career aspirations – where young people at age

16 underestimate the qualifications or education level needed to get into certain jobs.^{17 18} Whilst this is applicable to all young people, it is those from more disadvantaged backgrounds who are more likely to have developed their career ambitions with a lack of information for the demands of the current labour market and are more likely to benefit from these interventions.^{24 25}

For example:

I think for our demographic, for our students, every single one would benefit from attending an event like this. That being said, social mobility in our area, in our school, is really low. I think giving those type of students the exposure, allowing them to talk to people from different backgrounds, cultures and careers has a really great impact on the girls. Just in terms of raising aspirations events like today are massively beneficial. The disadvantaged young people can really gain lots from these events, lots of them just don't know about the careers available, lots of them will be pigeon holed into certain careers because of parental ideas or pressure.

Year 9 teacher – London¹²

It also appears that young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds have the least access to employer-led careers provision through their schools. Mann and colleagues note that the young British adults who reported the lowest levels of employer engagement in their education came, on average, from more disadvantaged backgrounds: those who had received free school meals, whose parents had

24. Gutman, L.S. and Schoon, I. (2012). Correlates and consequences of uncertainty in career aspirations: gender differences among adolescents in England. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 80(3), 608-618.

25. Croll, P., Attwood, G. and Fuller, C. (2010). *Children's Lives, Children's Futures – A Study of Children Starting Secondary School*. London: Continuum.

not attended university and whose own highest qualifications were GCSEs (or level 2 equivalent) or lower. Moreover, young people reporting the highest levels of engagement were more likely to go to independent and grammar schools, and go on to achieve higher level qualifications.⁶ Employer-led careers events appear more common in selective fee-paying schools than in state comprehensives.^{26 5}

Attainment level

Surveys of teaching staff suggest that different types of learners respond in different ways to careers events. Mann and colleagues' 2016 study of teacher perspectives found that employee-delivered careers support was perceived to be of particularly high value to higher achievers at both pre and post-16 who may have developed initial aspirations surrounding a number of high-profile professions and could benefit from a broader consideration of university and employment options.²⁷ Mann and Dawkins agree:

At 11–16: careers talks, fairs and networking events are the most effective employer engagement interventions to support high achievers; to broaden aspirations; and in making good decisions on continuing study.

At 16–19: career-focused employer engagement activities are among the most effective interventions in helping young people to make good decisions about continuing study and to understand what's needed to get a job; and in supporting higher achievers. (p. 12).²⁸

Gender

New evidence presented by McIntosh and Yates finds that girls appear to get the most from careers fairs specifically. They evaluated the efficacy of careers fairs for 275 year 10 and 11 students across nine schools and found that girls felt more aware of opportunities and more confident in their career decision making after the fair compared to their male counterparts.²⁹

New evidence presented in this review echoes these findings.¹² Across all of the questions asked in our survey, girls found events to be more helpful and impactful in terms of changing attitudes towards education, career decision making and social capital development compared to boys.

I know they felt special that it was just a girl's event. Certainly the fact that they can speak to women definitely has more of an effect. Giving these girls role models, female ones especially, is a really great idea. Giving the girls a chance to see that women can be successful has a really profound effect and really broadens their horizons.

Year 9 teacher – London¹²

Age comparison of the responses of young people who took part in these sessions at key stages 4 and 5 suggest that later timing may encourage participants to view these activities as more relevant and useful. The survey used by Mann and Kashefpakdel shows that later careers events are perceived by young adults to have been of considerably higher benefit than pre-16 sessions in: career decision making, getting into a university and getting a job.⁵

26. Huddleston, P., Mann, A., and Dawkins, J. (2012). Employer Engagement in English Independent schools. London: Education and Employers.

27. Mann, A. Dawkins, J. and McKeown, R. (2017). Towards an Employer Engagement Toolkit: British Teachers' Perspectives on the Comparative Efficacy of Work-Related Learning Activities. London: Education and Employers.

28. Mann, A. and Dawkins, J. (2014). Employer Engagement in Education. London: Education and Employers.

29. McIntosh, I., and Yates, J. (with readers). Evaluating employer career interventions in English schools. British Journal of Guidance and Counselling. This reference cannot be found online

Teachers interviewed also note that careers events are particularly valuable for young people if they are offered prior to them making key decisions about their futures. For example:

I think at 16/17 this really gives them a chance to launch their futures. Before this they haven't really had a chance to think about their careers, and even if they have they will probably change their minds again by the time they reach 6th form. At a younger age it is really difficult to tailor the event for their interests as they have so many. At 16/17 they can ask really pertinent questions about UCAS applications the qualifications/degrees they should pursue to get onto certain careers. It's more engaging for them as the answers to their questions have that real life applicability.
Year 7 – 13 careers coordinator - Essex¹²

There is good evidence that young people gain particularly from careers events which expose them to adults with first-hand experiences of the jobs about which they are talking.

The panel of experienced practitioners overwhelmingly agreed that careers events are especially effective if they take place before students have to make decisions about their futures (e.g. at 14, 16, 18 years old).

Authenticity

It is important that the people providing information to pupils about jobs and careers can draw on personal, first-hand

experience of the same professions. There is good evidence that young people gain particularly from careers events which expose them to adults with first-hand experiences of the jobs about which they are talking. It appears that these interactions offer a certain authenticity which young people appreciate in comparison to other sources.³⁰ Analysing survey data from several hundred teenagers, Mann and Caplin found that careers information derived from direct interactions with employers was perceived to be of more value to young people when thinking about their career choices than information gathered from close ties such as parents or friends or that derived from online sources or media.³¹ Looking specifically at employer engagement in a specific area e.g. Mansfield, East Midlands, England - Hutchinson and Dickinson also found from their small scale study that when asked whose advice they most value, 61% of young people in the sample would most value the advice of someone who works in that job or career – a higher proportion than any other source (including parents).³² It appears that they see employers and employees as being able to provide honest, reliable information:

'[Pupils] believe employers, they don't believe us. They see employers as different. They form a relationship with them and that gives them a sense of reality of what's happening post-16'. Focus group with Key Stage 4 teachers, South West England. (P.4)³³

30. Jones, S., Mann, A. and Morris, K. (2015). The 'employer engagement cycle' in secondary education: Analysing testimonies of young British adults. *Journal of Education and Work*, 29(7), 834-856.

31. Mann, A. and Caplin, S. (2012). *Closing the Gap: How Employers Can Change the Way Young People See Apprenticeships*. London: Education and Employers & PricewaterhouseCoopers.

32. Hutchinson, J. and Dickinson, B. (2014). Employers and schools: How Mansfield is building a world of work approach. *Local Economy*, 29(3), 257-266.

33. Mann, A. and Dawkins, J. (2014). *Teacher and Pupil Voices on Employer Engagement: Insights from Three Focus Groups and Semi-Structured Interviews with Five English Secondary Schools (2011-12)*. London: Education and Employers.

These interventions can be seen as providing a form of social capital, expanding the effective personal networks of young people by giving them access to larger numbers of professionals with more varied types of experience than would be available from family-based social networks.^{34 35} Such interventions have been seen to add particular value by increasing access to 'non-redundant, trusted information' about the availability of economic opportunities and the suitability of a potential applicant for potential jobs.³⁶ As Sabates and colleagues state, for example:

As more youth strive for post-secondary education and professional jobs, information about prospective occupations and alignment of occupations and educational ambitions becomes increasingly important for youths' ability to plan effectively for their future (p 17).¹⁷

When interviewed, teachers and careers professionals agreed that employers offer authentic insights that cannot be replicated by education professionals, for example:

Trust me when I start talking about careers you can see their eyes glaze over. I haven't been in the 'jobs market' for over 30 years! They think I'm out of touch. When you have the younger volunteers come in, they stand up and take notice.

Careers advisor – Brentwood¹²

We try to get people from outside of the school to come and speak to our students as well as just the careers advisor. I think that has more impact than just speaking to the teacher, because you see the same faces and hear the same voices all the time. The kids

have also said they enjoy having that extra new voice coming in.

Year 9 teacher – London¹²

This is a sentiment echoed by young people attending these career events. When surveyed after the events organised for this report a large majority of students agreed that as a result of talking to volunteers, they had learnt something new and useful in terms of pursuing a career ambition. In thinking about employee volunteers, the students were clear: what was most important to them was that volunteers had direct experience of jobs about which they spoke. When the question of authenticity was put to a panel of 38 experienced practitioners they overwhelmingly agreed that careers events were most effective when the presenter was clearly someone from the world of work.

Volume

The more interactions a young person has with people from the world of work through careers events, the better. Over recent years, several influential studies have shown that attending more of employer-led careers events can and does amplify the outcomes experienced by young people. A 2010 study by Deloitte for Education and Employers explored the links between the volume of such employer contacts and confidence in progression. The study found that young people who had spoken to four or more employers about careers were significantly more confident about their career ambitions than peers reporting fewer contacts.³⁷

34. Raffo, C. and Reeves, M. (2000). Youth transitions and social exclusion: developments in social capital theory. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 3(2), 147-166.

35. Stanley, J. and Mann, A. (2014). A theoretical framework for employer engagement. In Mann, A., Stanley, J. and Archer, L. (Eds.) *Understanding Employer Engagement in Education: Theories and Evidence*. London: Routledge, pp.36-52.

36. Granovetter, M. (1995). *Getting a Job – A Study of Contacts and Careers*. Second edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

37. Deloitte (2010). *Helping Young People Succeed: How Employers Can Support Careers Education*. London: Education and Employers.

Similarly, Mann and Kashefpakdel note that young adults aged 19–24 who recalled attending three or more school-mediated careers advice interventions (careers talks, careers fairs) felt that the events were significantly more helpful to them later in

Mann and Kashefpakdel conclude that the more young people attended events, the more helpful they became.

life than peers who attended just one or two events. Young people who attended three or more were 16% more likely to say they found the events useful in getting a job and 28% more likely to say they were helpful in deciding on a career. Moreover, while 88% of young adults who heard from three or more employers about careers while at school say it helped them decide on a career (with 28% saying it helped a lot), the respective figures for peers who took part in two or fewer careers talks were 55% and 8%.⁵ Mann and Kashefpakdel conclude that the more young people attended events, the more helpful they became.

A robust study analysing the impact of multiple employer contacts is Kashefpakdel and Percy's 2016 study of career talks with people from outside of school. The evidence presented in this analysis of British Cohort Study data shows higher levels of employer contacts are correlated with better labour market outcomes (as measured by earnings) at age 26. With controls for background characteristics and academic success in place, each careers talk with outside speakers at age 14–15 in

the mid-1980s was associated with a 0.8% wage uplift in 1996, among those in full-time employment. Kashefpakdel and Percy also found that teenagers who reported that their careers talks were typically 'very helpful' took part in a larger number of events than peers who found them less helpful.¹⁵ When the question of volume was put to practitioners there was broad agreement that the more career events a student attends, the better.¹²

Analysis of young people's survey data collected at the careers events attended for this study shows that the number of volunteers encountered has a beneficial effect on the outcomes that can be expected. Young people who had interacted with six or more volunteers reported more positive responses across a number of areas. Those who saw six or more volunteers were 15% more likely to say they had learnt something new and useful, 13% more likely to say the event made them think of different routes to employment and 14% more likely to say they were motivated to study harder than peers who encountered fewer volunteers.¹²

Relevance

Insights from both Mann and colleagues and Kashefpakdel and Percy demonstrate that what students think about the quality of the careers provision is important – specifically that better economic outcomes in adulthood are related to positive views of school or college interventions. In the survey used by Mann and colleagues, a representative sample of 19 to 24 year old Britons was asked whether the employer

engagement activities they experienced whilst in school or college had been helpful to them in getting a job, getting into university or deciding on a career. Analysis showed that the young adults were right: respondents who felt their teenage employer engagement to have been helpful went on to earn more and experience lower rates of being NEET than peers. Consistently it was the young adults who recalled the most engagements who found the activities undertaken to have proved to have been more helpful to them.³⁸ The study, however, does not distinguish between careers-focused sessions with employers and other types of employer-led provision – whereas Kashefpakdel and Percy look specifically at career talks with people from outside of school. In their study students who took part in career talks at 14/15 and found them ‘very helpful’ witnessed a 1.6% increase in earnings per career talk at age 26.³⁸

When students find careers events ‘helpful’ or ‘very helpful’ it can be assumed that they are experiencing events which they feel are relevant to them as individuals. The more events a student takes part in, consequently, the more likely it is that they will encounter information which they feel is relevant to them. Moote and Archer found that students voiced concerns that careers events were often not personalised and lacked relevance to them. They also found students mentioned the unhelpful nature of larger group sessions, and expressed a desire for more tailored, one to one support:

If it was like kind of a smaller group, like kind of a one-on-one meeting. Cos the way we did it was like everyone in the hall, and sat on tables and stuff, and it was just noisy, you couldn't really hear anything.

Gemma, Seychelloise girl, social class 3³⁹

Preparation and follow up

Positive impacts can be expected to be optimised when young people are well prepared for careers events and undertake follow up activities after the activity. Schools and colleges should set aside time for students to prepare before an event begins. Students consistently report that employer engagement activities were more useful if they have had time to think about their wider ambitions and prepare themselves prior to an event taking place. Educational and careers professionals also highlight that it is important to prepare the young people prior to any event taking place.

I've had feedback from employers before to say it would have been more useful for the students to have had some questions in mind so we've really been pushing on that. I think also with the age group we're working with which is mainly 16–18 vocational they struggle with the soft skills, you know the ability to go up to an employer. From other events and other colleges I've worked at I think giving them a chance to prepare questions beforehand, maybe even a bit of role play, really helps their confidence and what they get out of an event.

Careers advisor, Further Education College – Oxfordshire¹²

38. Kashefpakdel, E. T. and Percy, C. (2016). Career education that works: An economic analysis using the British Cohort Study. *Journal of Education and Work*, 30 (3), 217–234.

39. Moote, J. and Archer, L. (2017). Failing to deliver? Exploring the current status of career education provision in England. *Research Papers in Education*. Available from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2016.1271005> [Accessed 1st July 2017].

We have gone through a lot of preparation prior to this event, and I think it really helps when it comes to getting the most out of these speed networking talks. We ask the students to prioritise their interests and then group the students based on these interests. We then ask them to draft a set of questions which they then talk through with their form tutor. We then give them a list of the employer profiles once they have been confirmed. This means that they can tailor their questions and really make the most out of the time they have with the employer.

Sixth form careers coordinator – Essex¹²

During careers events educational and careers professionals suggest that the young people must be managed and given encouragement to ensure they actively participate and engage with employers. This is especially relevant for younger students. For example:

[With careers fairs] We've also got staff that go down into the hall with a specific group, usually their personal mentor or class teacher. We usually circle the room, making sure that groups don't just stand in the middle, they ask individual students what they're interested in and point them towards a relevant table. They also try to give a time that the young people have to stay in the hall, which is easier to police at a smaller event like the ones we've had recently.

Careers advisor, Further Education College – Oxfordshire¹²

One experienced employee volunteer argued that it is vital that young people are encouraged out of their comfort zones, designing events for example out of school and including mixing with students of other schools. For example:

Some of them are lacking confidence and forcing them into situations where they have to speak and talk to people more is really beneficial. Getting them out of their comfort zones when they're working with kids from other schools is really great for building their social skills and team working skills.

Employee volunteer – London¹²

Another argues that it is also important to prepare the volunteers prior to the activity taking place.

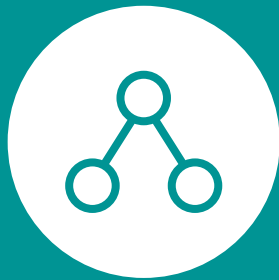
I think it's important for schools to let volunteers know what the young people need or want to know. As they see them every day, they are more in tune with the needs of the young people. At today's talk, I was covering a lot of bases in only base level detail. Also it would be useful if the school got all the hospitality students in one room, as today we had young people from construction who lost interest as soon as I started even though there were sections on interview skills which would be of use to them.

Employee volunteer – Oxfordshire¹²

A number of educational professionals noted that whilst advice from people from the world of work was a crucial element in any careers provision, follow up advice from a careers professional helped to consolidate and make sense of the information provided.

Data included in Macintosh and Yates' unpublished study concurs with these insights. They find that a young person's career awareness and confidence are greatly improved when they have attended a wraparound preparation and follow up session with a careers professional, compared to a careers fair alone.³⁵

5. Comparison between different types of career events



Career talks

Careers talks typically offer a longer engagement and allow young people to hear in great depth about a specific job or careers. Talks can be very effective in broadening career aspirations, exposing young people to options that may not have previously considered. When asked, 65% of teachers in our survey agreed that careers talks worked the best to raise the aspirations of students.¹²

(A talk) brings a further dimension. I think it adds so much more. Because I used to teach employability skills and you can stand up in front a group and tell them things about careers or about employability skills and they don't really take notice. But you get someone from outside and they really take notice, it makes them really think about what skills they've got and how they can show them off, especially if the employer asks tough questions. I also think when you get a guest speaker in it makes young people think "hang on a minute she's (my usual teacher) been talking about this all year, maybe it's time I pay attention a bit to what she's said." Someone has come in and backed her up.

Careers advisor, Further Education College – Oxfordshire¹²

In terms of intensity, a careers talk will likely be the longest duration in terms of time with the session most likely focused on a particular career. This risks alienating those who are not interested in the career that is being spoken about and turning off as a result. To reduce the risk of attendees switching off, teachers have recommended having a variety of speakers.

I think also it helps when you've got people coming from different backgrounds at different stages in their career. Not just the HR managers or the CEOs. So today we had two apprentices come in and give a talk from BMW, who must only be 19 or 20, they gave the young people a chance to see their direct next step, and they offered really useful advice on pay, the roles themselves and the young people in that talk seemed to be the most engaged in terms of asking questions.

Careers advisor, Further Education College – Oxfordshire¹²

Potential disadvantages of this form of careers event is that it allows the young person little agency in the activity, and requires a very able speaker to secure the attention of the young people.

I'm not sure whether this sort of format, certainly in terms of the room layout, is the best for allowing young people to learn new things about potential career paths. I think sitting behind their desks in a classroom scenario doesn't get them far enough away from their daily routine – especially as this is the classroom they are usually in. It doesn't make the message seem important as I could easily be another staff member talking at them for half an hour. They feel too comfortable. To actually take something away from these events they need to be slightly out of their comfort zone.

Employee volunteer – Oxfordshire¹²

Careers carousels

Careers carousels present young people with a greater opportunity to engage in conversation with adults who are not parents or teachers. Younger students in particular rarely have the chance to communicate with adults from the world of work, which can become an issue when it comes to school to work transitions in later life. Teachers who have direct experience of career networking events often see them as being especially valuable for younger (for example Year 9) or less confident pupils, as the structure of the events require rapid and effective discussions with a series of adults, so enhancing communication skills whilst imparting careers information.³⁴ Surveyed teachers for this report agreed that careers carousels are more effective than the two other types of careers events for students who lack confidence and for students aged under 15.¹²

Whilst careers fairs can also offer opportunities to speak to a large number of volunteers, unless the fair itself is tightly managed students can often pass by volunteers without much engagement. The format of careers carousel events requires young people to actively participate.

The young people at my school have had experience of job fairs and university visits as well as other talks, and from my experience I think the networking events work the best. The fact they actually have to go round and speak to people really pushes them a bit more. At careers fairs it's all laid out for you, even though there's lots of companies and people to speak to sometimes you can just glaze past them.

Sixth form careers coordinator – Essex¹²

Also, the good thing about this sort of event compared to others is that it really brings out the best from the kids lacking confidence. We have a few recent joiners whose English isn't great so they lack the confidence to ask the questions they want to know in a big assembly, with this type of event the girls support each other and I can see they're giving each other the encouragement to speak up.

Employee volunteer – London¹²

Results from the student survey align with this finding. Across the six events that were surveyed, students reported meeting the highest number of volunteers at careers carousels events. Carousels leave students with no choice but to speak to a variety of employee volunteers. In this sense, they are the most effective in presenting young people with a variety of career pathways and choices, encountering a range of different volunteers.

I think the rotation is fantastic. It gives the young people a chance to meet such a variety of volunteers from different parts of the organisation but also different genders and career histories. I, for example, will be able to give practical guidance to the young people thinking of applying to positions as I only completed the application process six months ago. But others will be able to talk about the trainee or apprenticeship route, as well as talking about their backgrounds and how they navigated school and college to get where they are now. I think it's important that the volunteers actually engage. They don't just speak in a monologue, the best thing about these events is the interactivity, so the employers should be asking questions and tailoring the conversations, and not be afraid of a few awkward silences!

Employee volunteer – London¹²

This may explain why careers carousels are routinely seen in our surveys of students and careers practitioners as most helpful in improving career awareness and educational engagement compared to other careers events. In terms of practical advice, experienced practitioners shared three tips for maximising the benefits for young people taking part:

1. Selecting a chair or leader to encourage other students to speak. They found this most useful when they allocated this a student who was less confident in speaking to adults.

One bit of advice I'd give would be to have a group chair or leader. We allocated each group a 'group leader' who would steer the conversation or ask questions if the others lost things to say. We either allocated this to a student we knew would be confident speaking to adults but we also picked out students who we knew were particularly shy to give them the impetus to speak up and get the most out of speaking to the volunteers.

Sixth form careers coordinator – Essex¹²

2. Keeping group sizes small and splitting between two locations to reduce noise.

We also purposely kept the groups small (7 students per table) and split it between two locations. Having just over 50 students in each room meant that the noise levels stayed low and meant each student could be heard and could also hear the volunteer response.

Sixth form careers coordinator – Essex¹²

3. Keeping the activity below an hour to ensure pupils stay engaged.

I would also keep it to an hour max. Having it any longer tires out the pupils and more so the volunteers. They have to repeat themselves for an hour which can get quite tiring! We also gave them around 10 minutes per volunteer which from past experience is the right amount of time.

Sixth form careers coordinator – Essex¹²

Careers fairs

Careers fairs provide students with the opportunity to explore the greatest range of careers out of any of the three events considered in this review. The marketplace style format allows the greatest potential number of different volunteers from the greatest number of sectors to engage with young people. One teacher suggested that the larger these events, the better they are for young people taking part.

With events like these the bigger the better really. Today you'll see we've got a really large range of employers covering across the board. We've got all the vocational and educational tracks covered. I think if you have smaller fairs and a student comes in and doesn't see what they're looking for, it can really put them off other events in the future and almost stunts them when their thinking about their future.

Vice principal – London¹²

Despite the opportunity afforded to young people attending these events, if they are not carefully managed by staff there is a risk that young people lack the desire or

confidence to speak to employers, particularly if they do not feel they understand the occupation represented. Students can also succumb to peer pressure meaning that it cannot be taken for granted that they will explore their own personal interests. An advantage, therefore, of the other two

...it can be argued that careers fairs are likely to be the worst mechanism for challenging gender stereotyping amongst the careers events considered in this review.

approaches is that they require students to consider career paths which they might otherwise have ruled out through ignorance or unfounded preconceptions. For these reasons, it can be argued that careers fairs are likely to be the worst mechanism for challenging gender stereotyping amongst the careers events considered in this review. One example given included:

I think careers fairs, in my experience, often turn into a bit of a no man's land. They're a chance to pick up free pens. There's no preparation and it means the less confident students can sink into the background and take very little from the events.

Sixth form careers coordinator – Essex¹²

However, the careers fair format does also have notable advantages. Practitioners report that they work especially well for younger students who will be exploring careers perhaps for the first time in such a manner. Moreover, by bringing in a large and often diverse number of industries, they are likely to generate the maximum choice of occupational area, meaning that students have a greater likelihood of speaking to a volunteer more aligned to their interests. This may explain why surveyed students who were undecided about their career ambitions perceived careers fairs to be more useful than other events. If these events are well managed and young people are gently coerced to explore new occupations and sectors, the risk of peer pressure and conformity amongst attending pupils can be mitigated.

6. Developing the evidence base



There is an evidence base that suggests that careers events are effective, and that they can have markedly positive outcomes on the economic outcomes, educational engagement and career progression of the young people taking part. There have been a number of peer reviewed, methodologically robust studies on economic outcomes particularly Hughes and colleagues.⁴⁰ However, the literature remains limited, and very limited with regard to the comparative value of different types of events. More comprehensive research is needed on the value of each event to students of different age, attainment level and socio-economic background.

Key areas for improving the evidence base include:

- creating longer term evaluations to assess and attempt a quantification of impacts on educational attainment and participation in the world of work; and
 - introducing more experimental research designs to identify optimal intervention points and approaches.
-
- creating more robust evaluation and research designs. This may include increasing the sample size and the use of randomised control groups to offer more concrete conclusions on impacts and efficacy;

40. Hughes, D., Mann, A., Barnes, S-A., Baldauf, B. and Mc Keown, R. (2016). *An International Literature Review: Careers Education, on behalf of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)*. London: Education Endowment Foundation.

Conclusion

There are a number of high quality studies that provide evidence of improved employment outcomes for young people taking part in these events, both in terms of wage premiums and reduced incidence of NEET (Not in Education Employment or Training). The wider literature, as well as evidence from student survey and practitioner survey carried out for this review, suggests that participation in careers events with employers can also have positive impacts on the decision making, employability skills and educational outcomes for the young people taking part.

The evidence included in this review also helps provide a range of insights for practice. Research suggests, and both students and practitioners agree, that it matters who delivers information within careers events. There is a very strong preference for hearing directly from people who actually do the jobs they are talking about. Authenticity is important. It also appears that the higher volume of activities a young person participates in, the greater the outcomes that can be expected. Moreover, if a student perceives the encounter to be helpful, positive impacts are enhanced. Practitioners can also benefit from carrying out thorough preparation and follow up. Finally, the evidence suggests that there are advantages and disadvantages of each event type. There is value in each activity for different pupil types at different stages in their school to work transition. However, a clear view emerges from the study that, in general terms, students consistently gain more from careers carousels.

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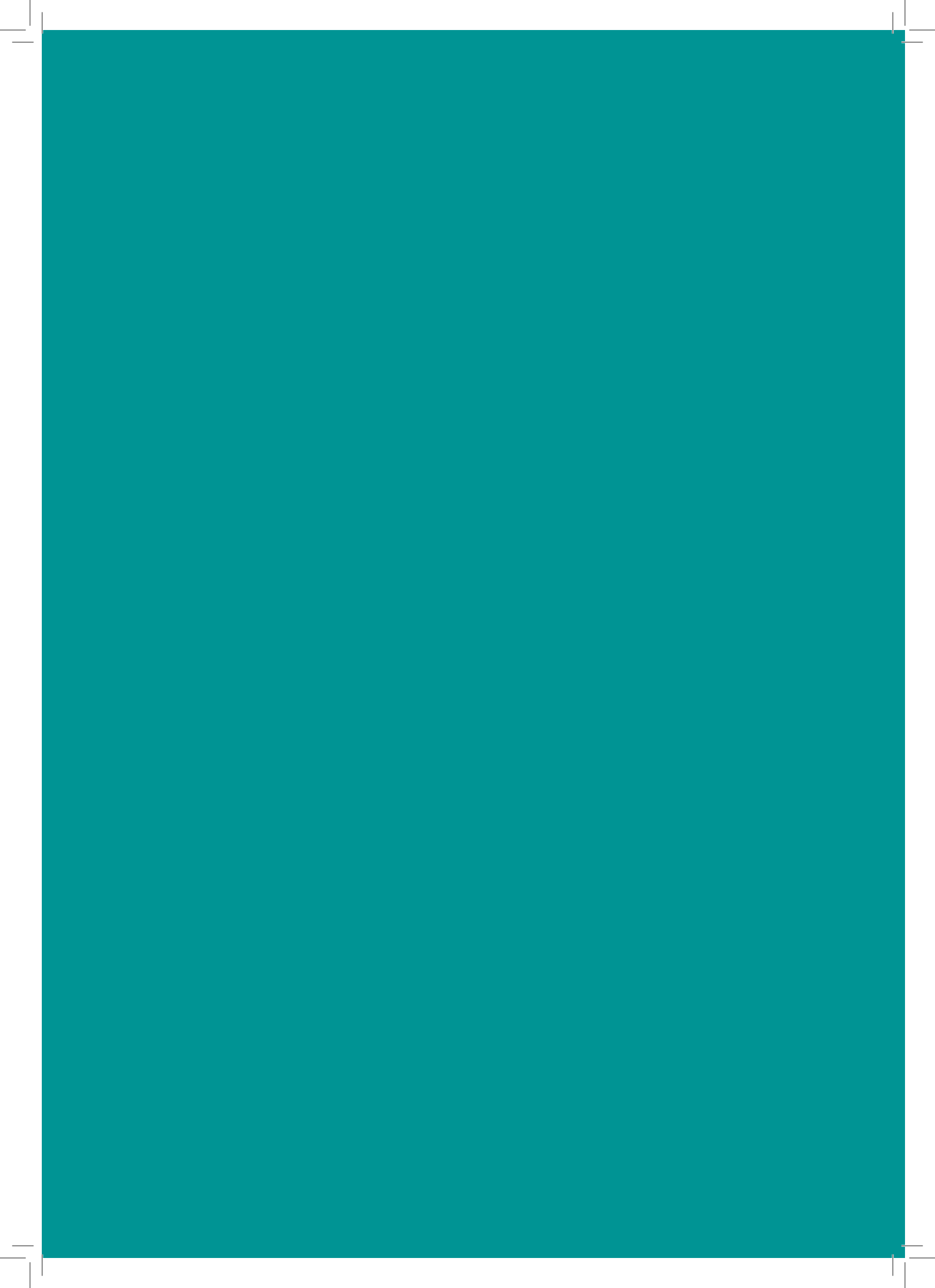
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Notes



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